

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 CAIRO 10622 121331Z
ACTION SS-25

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S E C R E T CAIRO 10622

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV PINT ECON ECSM EG
SUBJECT: REPORTED RESIGNATION OF MINSUPPLY/TRADE ZAKARIA
TEWFIK

REF: (A) CAIRO 10322, (B) CAIRO 10523

1. AS REPORTED IN OTHER CHANNELS, MINSUPPLY/TRADE ZAKARIA TEWFIK IS SAID TO HAVE SUBMITTED HIS RESIGNATION AFTERNOON APRIL 10. HE REPORTEDLY DID SO BECAUSE OF ANNOYANCE OVER PRIMIN SALEM'S DECISION ESTABLISH SPECIAL MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE, HEADED BY KAISSOUNI (EVEN THOUGH HE HAS RESIGNED AND HAS NOT BEEN IN HIS OFFICE FOR TEN DAYS) AND INCLUDING MINFINANCE HAMED AND MINECON EL-SAYEH, CHARGED WITH INVESTIGATING CAUSES OF INFLATIONARY PRICE RISES AND DOING SOMETHING ABOUT THEM. TEWFIK SAW THIS AS AN EFFORT BY SALEM TO PIN THE TAIL ON HIM FOR PRICE RISES AS WELL AS COMMODITY SHORTAGES. THIS WAS ALL THE MORE GALLING TO HIM SINCE HE, ALONE OF THE ECONOMIC MINISTERS, HAD OPPOSED PRICE RISES.

2. THERE ARE SOME ASPECTS OF REPORTED TEWFIK RESIGNATION WHICH REMAIN CLOUDED, HOWEVER. FIRST, ALTHOUGH OUR INITIAL REPORT SUGGESTED RESIGNATION HAD BEEN SUBMITTED

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LATE AFTERNOON APRIL 10, TEWFIK WAS PRESENT AND SPOKE AT YESTERDAY'S PEOPLES ASSEMBLY DEBATE ON PRICE RISES (REFTELS). SECOND, AS IN THE CASE OF KAISSOUNI RESIGNATION, TEWFIK'S RESIGNATION HAS NOT YET BEEN ANNOUNCED. THIS SUGGESTS TO US THAT EFFORT IS BEING MADE TO PERSUADE HIM WITHDRAW IT EVEN THOUGH WE UNDERSTAND MIN LOCAL GOVT MAHMOUD HAS BEEN ALERTED HANDLE TEWFIK'S MINISTERIAL

FUNCTIONS. THIRD, WHEN AMBASSADOR ATTEMPTED CALL TEWFIK TODAY, HIS SECRETARY INITIALLY INDICATED THAT HE WAS NOT YET IN BUT WOULD ARRIVE IN HALF AN HOUR. SUBSEQUENT CALLS SIMPLY BROUGHT RESPONSE THAT HE WAS AT HOME WITH NO OTHER EXPLANATION. NOTHING WAS SAID ABOUT CONTACTING MAHMOUD. WILL TRY AGAIN TOMORROW TO SEE WHETHER HE IS BACK. FOURTH, TODAY'S PRESS, IN REPORTING YESTERDAY'S PA DEBATE ON PRICE RISES, HAS FRONT PAGE PICTURES OF TEWFIK AT YESTERDAY'S PA SESSION. THIS IS RARE, SINCE REGULAR MINISTERS (INCLUDING TEWFIK) ARE SELDOM GIVEN SUCH MEDIA - PHOTOGRAPHIC EXPOSURE. GIVEN THE WAY THE SYSTEM WORKS, HIS PHOTOGRAPHIC PROMINENCE GIVEN TEWFIK HAD TO BE ON GOE ORDERS. IT MIGHT MEAN ONE OF TWO THINGS: THE FINGER IS INDEED BEING POINTED AT HIM AS THE RESPONSIBLE PARTY OR AN ATTEMPT TO FLATTER HIS EGO SO THAT HE AGREES TO REMAIN. PRIMIN SALEM CAN PLAY IT EITHER WAY.

3. AS REPORTED REF A, TEWFIK HAS FOR SOME TIME BEEN FED UP AND HAD BEEN TALKING ABOUT QUITTING. ON EVENING APRIL 9 (DAY BEFORE HIS RESIGNATION ALLEGEDLY TENDERED), AMBASSADOR HAD LONG SEPARATE TALKS WITH HIM AND HIS WIFE AT FONMIN KAMEL'S DINNER PARTY. (TEWFIK'S WIFE IS KAMEL'S SISTER.) MRS. TEWFIK EXPRESSED A CONCERN THAT HER HUSBAND WAS BEING MADE A SCAPEGOAT AND RECALLED NO RECENT MINSUPPLY HAD LASTED MORE THAN ONE YEAR. HER HUSBAND, SHE NOTED, HAD ALREADY BEEN
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IN OFFICE TWO YEARS. IT WAS A THANKLESS JOB AND HE FREQUENTLY SPOKE OF GETTING OUT. TEWFIK, IN CONTRAST, APPEARED TO BE IN UNUSUALLY GOOD SPIRITS AND SPOKE CHEERFULLY OF HAVING GOTTEN U.S. AND FRG AGREEMENT TO PROVIDE SOME AUTOMATED BAKERIES. HE SHOWED SOME RESENTMENT OF PA MEMBERS' CRITICISMS, BUT SEEMED TO THINK FRUIT AND VEGETABLE SHORTAGES WERE ON VERGE OF BEING ALLEVIATED. HE WAS ESPECIALLY APPRECIATIVE OF OUR HELP IN PROVIDING PL 480 WHEAT AND, MOST RECENTLY, A CIP ALLOCATION FOR CORN.

4. SOMETHING PRESUMABLY HAPPENED FOLLOWING DAY TO CAUSE HIM SUBMIT RESIGNATION. IT MAY BE THE ANTI-INFLATION COMMITTEE THAT WAS THE STRAW THAT BROKE THE CAMEL'S BACK OR IT MAY BE SOMETHING ELSE. AMBASSADOR HAS MEETING SCHEDULED, APRIL 13, WITH MINECON HAMED EL-SAYEH (WHO WAS AT SAME DINNER) AND WILL QUERY HIM ON REPORTED KAISSOUNI AND TEWFIK RESIGNATIONS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS. IF TEWFIK ACTUALLY LEAVES, ONE OF THE BETTER SENIOR EGYPTIAN MANAGERS WILL HAVE DEPARTED. COMING ON HEELS REPORTED KAISSOUNI RESIGNATION, IT WILL FURTHER AGGRAVATE CABINET DISARRAY.
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